

Reviewers' Evaluation for Public Charter School Application

Applicant **INSPIRE ME ACADEMY (IMA)**

Date **10/10/14**

Review Team: John Bird (Chair), Jana Lapoint and Michael Wilhelm

An Education Plan

A.1. Mission, Vision, Identification of targeted student population and the community the school hopes to serve

Strengths

- **A mission and vision are clearly articulated and specific vision elements are noted.**
- **Target populations are identified.**

Questions, Concerns

- **The need for the school in the catchment area is not clearly supported with adequate evidence.**
- **Provided statistical information on the catchment area with the current student test results, but did not demonstrate how IMA would meet those students' needs.**
- **It is noted that few options exist for the populations IMA intends to serve, but the options that do exist are not provided.**

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

A.2. Academic Program

Strengths

- **The Understanding by Design model for unit design is noted as a model that will be employed and an example is provided that demonstrates its use.**
- **Understanding by Design is a sound planning structure.**
- **A full-time foreign language teacher is included in the proposal.**
- **Considerable time is devoted daily to physical education, math and writing instruction.**

Questions, Concerns

- **Proposal refers to IMA's intent to adopt some practices from Achievement First Schools, but does not specify what an Achievement First School is or provide any research-based literature that supports this type of school.**
- **No evidence presented to substantiate Achievement First's success or its decision-making process; also no adequate vetting of its credentials.**
- **No established curriculum, only a design model.**
- **No evidence of how IMA will apply Maine Learning Results and Common Core to the curriculum.**
- **No curriculum to begin the year and unrealistic expectations that teachers will teach and develop curriculum simultaneously.**
- **A list of 10 Fundamental Elements of Quality Instruction is provided, but no research base is noted to support the list. It is unclear what research says about the impact of each of these elements.**

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

A.3. Special Student Populations

Strengths

- **The idea of dual-certified teachers.**
- **Inclusion model (least restrictive environment).**

Questions, Concerns

- **There is no evidence to support adequate knowledge of current practices, policies and procedures for ensuring a sound special education program. Although the application "speaks" of specialized teachers and commitment to inclusion, there is no evidence of the required description of specialized policy and procedure.**

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

A.4. Assessment

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speaks to the need for assessments and instructional modifications every six weeks.• Time set aside in the schedule for progress monitoring.• Weekly opportunities for staff data meetings are built into the school schedule to allow for data analysis and application to instructional decision making.
Questions, Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No specific measures are noted for the six-week monitoring program and no additional details are provided regarding what will be monitored.• No assessment process is outlined for content areas beyond reading and math.• Proposal notes that NECAP assessment will be used, but Maine is no longer using this assessment for math or ELA.• No description of how State Assessments will be used.
Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

A.5. School Climate and Discipline

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provided expectations of student conduct with emphasis on “GREAT” values (i.e., generosity, respect, enthusiasm, achievement and tenacity).• Parents would sign a commitment to three meetings per year and would be encouraged to participate in an advisory group.
Questions, Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No policy for student discipline except a program titled “Character Development”, which is not detailed.
Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

Education Plan Summary

Is the Education Plan compelling? Are we convinced that the applicant make a strong case for the quality of the program? Describe why or why not.

- **The education plan is not compelling. It is difficult to assess the quality of a program when the curriculum remains undefined, the use of assessment is unclear, and the expectations for teachers are potentially unrealistic.**

Does the Education Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- **The vision and mission are largely adapted from Achievement First Schools, but the applicant's vetting of the success of these schools and their components is incomplete at best.**

B Organizational Plan

B.1. School Calendar and Daily Schedule

Strengths

- **Increased both the number of school days per year and also the hours per day.**
- **Expects and articulates ways parents will be engaged with the school.**

Questions, Concerns

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

B.2. Student Recruitment and Enrollment

Strengths

- **A new board member with marketing experience has been recruited.**
- **Other board members appear to be well connected to many of the communities in the catchment area.**

Questions, Concerns

- **Evidence of potential for student recruitment and enrollment projections is largely anecdotal and speculative.**

- **IMA has convened three meetings to introduce the program to the community. Attendance overall has been modest, which would indicate that greater outreach is needed.**
- **There were no enrollment projections that would indicate their ability to meet enrollment targets.**

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

B.3. Staffing and Human Resources

Strengths

- **Overall number of teaching staff appears adequate for the projected number of students.**
- **Projected funding for both professional development and health benefits for full-time staff.**

Questions, Concerns

- **No evidence that recruiting and retaining effective teachers will be effective, especially given the high expectations (e.g., dual certification in special education) and low salaries.**
- **There is no fully articulated teacher evaluation process, no reference to state requirements and no specifics about rewards for positive teacher performance.**

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

B.4. Pre-Opening Plan

Strengths

- **Application reflects the school is aware of what is needed for compliance.**

Questions, Concerns

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

B.5. Management and Operation

Strengths

Questions, Concerns

- **Sample employee handbook appears to be generic and the rationale for its inclusion unclear.**
- **Role of board advisory group as described suggests it would assume functions normally the prerogative of the board and staff.**
- **While there is time set aside for professional development, there is no plan for it.**
- **Lack of clarity on how to select the school leader and roles of board and staff in assessing the school's overall progress.**

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

B.6. Community Development

Strengths

- **Board President is very connected to the community, with demonstrated ability to reach out.**

Questions, Concerns

- **No evidence of a relationship with the local school district except for possible transportation arrangement.**
- **While presenting a lot of evidence to suggest strong community involvement, the evidence indicates that a lot of it is tentative at this point.**

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

Management and Operations Summary

Are we convinced that the school has an effective plan to recruit, retrain and grow an outstanding staff? Describe why or why not.

- **IMA does not have an adequate plan to recruit, retain and grow outstanding staff, attributed to unrealistic expectations of recruiting dual-certified teachers, teacher work load, limited salary budget, and inadequate professional development plan.**

Do the Management and Operations Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- **While the management and operation's plan supports the School's mission and vision, the expectations placed on the head of school for curriculum, professional development, program management, supervision, and community interaction are potentially unrealistic.**

C Governance

C. 1. Governing Body

Strengths

- **The small group of founders is passionately dedicated to the School's mission and vision.**

Questions, Concerns

- **Governing Board is too small and lacks the skill-set diversity to meet IMA's governance needs. Using an advisory group to fill this gap is inadequate.**
- **There is confusion about the role of the Board and head of school in operating the school. The review team is troubled by the proposed employment of an "executive director" who would be directly attached to the Board.**
- **By-laws are generic and need to be tailored to fit the needs of IMA.**
- **Board positions need defined terms of office.**

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

C. 2. Governing Board Composition

Strengths

- **The Board has a passion for their proposal evidenced by the amount of work completed by a very few to submit a full application for review.**

Questions, Concerns

- **Governing Board is too small and lacks the skill-set diversity to meet IMA's governance needs, despite the recent inclusion of a member with an impressive marketing background.**
- **Board is top-heavy with educators, which perhaps explains their comfort level playing a hands-on role in the development and execution of the academic program.**

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

Governance Summary

Are we convinced that the Board members and Executive Leadership have the skills, background and understanding of their roles necessary to make this a viable and sustainable public charter school? Describe why or why not.

- **The review team concludes that the School's Founders lack the skills, background and role understanding needed to turn their mission and vision into a viable school (e.g., evidence indicates that the founders do not understand the board's role as policy makers vs. the role of the head and staff as hands-on managers).**

Does the Governance Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- **The Board appears to endorse fully the mission and vision as articulated in the application.**

D Business and Financial Services

D. 1. Budget

Strengths

- **Comprehensive budget presented.**

Questions, Concerns

- **The budget presented requires an ambitious fund-raising effort to balance. A grant and federal aid were included, neither of which has been formally requested. No evidence has been offered (e.g., tentative letters of funding support pending obtaining a charter) that the grants IMA' founders are pursuing will be forthcoming.**
- **There did not appear to be any contingency plan if the fund-raising effort was unsuccessful.**

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

D.2. Financial Management

Strengths

- **Indicates that the School will meet all requirements for financial and systems reporting.**

Questions, Concerns

- **No evidence of understanding of the financial systems and controls needed to run the School.**

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

D. 3. Facilities

Strengths

- **Have demonstrated a number of possibilities for school location.**
- **First choice for locating IMA needs a formal commitment from the owner. but is an excellent location.**

Questions, Concerns

- **While there have been discussions with possible facility owners/operators, nothing is firm at this point.**

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

D. 4. Transportation

Strengths

- **Plan to have parents bring students to school or car pool if outside the Sanford/Springdale catchment area.**
- **There is public transportation that goes right by the first choice of school building.**

Questions, Concerns

- **Transportation funds in the budget are not supported by any documentation.**
- **Has made contact with the local superintendent about sharing transportation, but no letter in the application to that effect.**

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

D.5. Insurance

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adequate funds have been included in the budget to cover all insurance needed to operate the School.
Questions, Concerns
Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

D. 6. Food Service

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All students will be provided free breakfast, lunch and snacks.
Questions, Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food service funds are not supported by any documentation or known comparable program descriptions.
Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

D. 7. Closure Protocol

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understands all the reports needed for closure.
Questions, Concerns
Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

Business and Financial Services Summary

Are we convinced that the applicant has operating capital adequate to open the school and for the first years of operation and have a viable sustainable model for the next five years? Describe why or why not.

- **It is unclear at best that IMA will have adequate funding to open its doors, and the supporting documentation for cost projections is not provided.**

Does the Finance Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

- **It is not clear that the finance plan will support the mission and vision given that its expectations for staff are not supported with adequate salary funds, that some cost center lines are minimal and rely on donations and are estimations lacking supporting evidence to lend credibility to those estimations.**

E Education Service Providers

Strengths

- **Not applicable.**

Questions, Concerns

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

Does the Education Service Providers Plan support the vision and mission of the school? Describe why or why not.

Strengths

- **Not applicable.**

Questions, Concerns

Address the overall section not each individual criteria. However if the Criteria is not adequate write your concern. These notes may be used at the in-person interview to address concerns.

Application Summary

Are you convinced that this is a unique viable model that will meet the needs of the students it wishes to serve? Describe why or why not.

- **Though the IMA application presents a mission and vision that could meet a need in the catchment area, the application lacks the depth of knowledge, understanding and detail – reflected throughout Sections A through D – needed to succeed at this time. Regrettably, we recommend that the Commission not move this application forward to the interview phase of the process, but encourage the applicant to address the issues raised in this report and resubmit the application in another year.**

Recommendation: **Deny** Approve

Circle one